DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 883 FL 027 456

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TITLE	Learning Genres, Learning about Genres and Learning through Genres: Educating Indigenous Learners.
SPONS AGENCY	Edith Cowan Univ., Perth (Australia).; Australian Research Council.
PUB DATE	2001-05-00
NOTE	16p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on "Genres and Discourses in Education, Work, and Cultural Life: Encounters of Academic Disciplines on Theories and Practices" (Oslo, Norway, May 13-16, 2001).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Aboriginal Australians; Cultural Influences; Elementary Education; English; Foreign Countries; Indigenous Populations; Learning Strategies; Schemata (Cognition); Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	Australia; *Genre Approach; Schema Theory

ABSTRACT

This research examined how Aboriginal speakers of English in Western Australia used genre in discourse, noting that the genre approach in most Australian schools has tended to ignore out-of-classroom performance and concentrate on changing behaviors rapidly through classroom instruction. Researchers analyzed 200 oral narratives produced by Aboriginal English speakers of varied ages from the lands of the Yamatji and Nyungar people between 1977-00. Speakers discussed topics of their choice. They examined what Aboriginal students in schools had already done in terms of learning genres, learning about genres, and learning through genres when exposed to genre-based instruction in schools. They took separate account of approaches to experience represented in the schemas by which speakers oriented themselves to the reality they talked about and the genres they employed in expressing themselves. Overwhelmingly, the preferred genre was the first person recount. Aboriginal students were accomplished learners of genres in their own communities, independently of what occurred at school. They were less well equipped for learning about genres. They were familiar with learning through genres, though the genres through which they learned were not those valued by the school system. The paper explains what Aboriginal students need to extend their competencies in genres. (Contains 30 references.) (SM)

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Learning Genres, Learning About Genres and Learning Through Genres: Educating Indigenous Learners

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Paper presented to the international conference on
"Genres and Discourses in Education, Work and Cultural Life:
Encounters of Academic Disciplines on Theories and Practices,"
Oslo College, 13th-16th May, 2001

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Genres and Schooling

Among the many ways of approaching genres, the one which has had most influence on schooling in Australia in recent times has been that which developed in Sydney among such linguists and educators as Martin (1990, 1997), Rothery (1990), Derewianka (1990) and others. Although the conceptualization of the genre which is entailed in this approach is underlain by a complex application of systemic-functional linguistic theory (Martin 1997), it has often been briefly summed up in the description: "staged, goal-oriented social processes" (Martin 1997:13; Rothery 1990:43; Hardy and Klarwein 1990:2 (citing Martin and Rothery)). The way in which this approach to genre has been interpreted in schools has been to emphasize the purpose-related alternative forms of staging of texts, often supporting such teaching with "scaffolding" (Rose, Gray and Cowey 1999) or boxes in which the successive stages of the text can be drafted (Thwaite 1998; Education Department of W.A. 1994).

Watkins (1999:131) has pointed out that approaches like this, which she calls "structuralist", have been adopted in all state English syllabus documents in Australia. She sees them, however, as having an unfortunate effect on pedagogy, and quotes with approval Kress's remarks that:

> "The Martin/Rothery account necessarily tends towards a firmer view of generic structure, a greater tendency towards reification of types, and an emphasis on the linguistic system as an inventory of types. With such a tendency goes the corresponding tendency pedagogically towards an emphasis on the matter of form, and a tendency towards authoritarian modes of transmission" (p. 130)

Watkins (1999), in analysing the discourse of a teacher in a year 3/ 4 class in Sydney, notes that this teacher's efforts to implement a "structuralist" curriculum lead her to treat a narrative text in such a way as to underestimate the importance of features other than the linear stages by which the curriculum defines the genre, and to be oblivious to student comments which respond to other features of the text. Thwaite (1998) observing the use of the genre approach in a Western Australian setting, also observed the potential dangers of an over-emphasis on formal features of text types, which, in her view, Martin and Rothery would not endorse (Thwaite, pers. comm.) and of limiting the focus of instruction to the genres for which structural frameworks are given in resource materials. Freedman (1995:75), writing from within the rhetorical genre tradition, has argued that, in view of the "highly contextualized and interactive nature of specific genres" the kind of explicit teaching of genres advocated by the Sydney school is probably a futile endeavour.

Some writers (e.g. Martin 1990; Walton 1990; Rose, Gray and Cowey 1999; Norman 1994) have, however, advocated the use of this approach to the teaching of genre with Indigenous students, in that it is seen to be a path to empowerment through the acquisition of the genres possessed by the power-holders in society. Usually supporters of this view concentrate primarily on written genres and allow no place in the educational process for the genres already employed by the Indigenous students. In particular, the prevalence of the Recount in Aboriginal students' writing has been seen as a handicap to these students in their acquisition of effective literacy (Martin 1990; Walton 1990; Rose, Gray and Cowey 1999). An alternative view has been put (e.g. Phillips 1992:27) which questions whether or not the exclusion of genres associated with the student's home dialect may be seen to be discriminatory.

There seems little doubt as to the fact that the practice of the genre approach in Australian schools has been associated a great deal with teaching *about* genres and also with teaching students to write *in* genres, but, in contradiction to its theoretical foundatons, it has given little attention to context (as illustrated more fully, for example, with respect to the Aboriginal Schools Curriculum Materials Project, in Malcolm 2000a) and it has virtually ignored the fact that teaching and learning occur *through* genres. It has been said by Halliday (1979) that language learning involves learning language, learning through language and learning about language. I want in this paper to explore how learning genres, learning about genres and learning through genres may be better taken account of, with Indigenous students, in a bidialectal approach which recognizes not only the genres of both Indigenous and non-indigenous cultures, but also the schemas which underlie them.

An Alternative Approach to Genre

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In a comprehensive review of approaches to genre, Paltridge (1997) has observed that the approach advocated in the ethnography of speaking distinguishes itself by a particular concern for the understanding of genres in terms of their social situatedness and their dependence on interpretation by members of the community within which they arise. In this, he echoes principles argued by Hymes (1972). This approach leads towards the recognition that genres exist primarily in the common understandings of people within a shared life context. For a comprehensive account of this, Paltridge has argued elsewhere (1995:393) it is necessary to have "a model for genre analysis which incorporates both social and cognitive aspects of language comprehension and production." Paltridge describes such a perspective as "pragmatic" and as founded on the concepts of "*prototype, intertextuality* and *inheritance*".

In seeking to understand the ways in which genres are used in the discourse of Aboriginal speakers of English in Western Australia, I and my colleagues (Malcolm et al 1999; Sharifian 2000) have taken a similar approach. We have found it necessary to take separate account of the approaches to experience which are represented in the prototypes, or (as we call them) *schemas* by which speakers orient themselves to the reality they talk (or write) about, and of the *genres*, or discourse forms which they employ in expressing themselves (See further Malcolm and Rochecouste 2000). Both schemas and genres are a cultural and social inheritance (See Sharifian 2000:9, re 'societal schemata') which provide a basis for individual expression. Schemas may be identified on the basis of how experience is represented (whether in the frame, for example, of hunting activity or travelling or encountering the unknown, etc.), and genres may be identified on the basis of their principal focus, or communicative purpose, and form. In describing genres we have used the generally accepted nomenclature, i.e., Recount, Narrative, Expository, Report, etc.

The observations to be made in this paper derive from the analysis of 200 oral narratives produced by Aboriginal English speakers from the lands of the Yamatji and Nyungar people in the south-west of Western Australia between 1977 and 2000. The research has been conducted on interactive and bidialectal principles and all interpretations of the Aboriginal texts have been arrived at on the basis of consensus between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal research staff. (See further Rochecouste and Malcolm 2000 and Malcolm, in preparation).

What Aboriginal Students Have Already Done With Genres

It was argued above that, in current teaching on genre in Australia, inadequate account is taken of what Aboriginal students can already do with genres, quite apart from what they learn in school. In support of this view, and with a view to helping the position to be rectified, I want to consider what Aboriginal students in schools have already done, in terms of learning genres, learning about genres and learning through genres, when they are exposed to genre-based instruction in schools.

The data on which this description is based consisted of the oral production of Aboriginal speakers on topics which they chose to speak about or to respond to. The speakers represent a variety of age groups, spread across school grades, and a small number of adults. In most cases the speech was elicited in small groups of Aboriginal, or predominantly Aboriginal, composition, by either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal investigators. The speakers do not represent a random sample of the respective Aboriginal populations, and the circumstances of recording did not favour the recording of a representative range of genres. The data commented upon here, then, represent no more than a sample of the communicative repertoire of Aboriginal English speakers. Both Yamatji and Nyungar communities are almost entirely English speaking and dwell in areas with predominantly non-Aboriginal populations. The Nyungar data came from Perth, a city of 1.2 million people, and can be assumed to represent the population of Western Australian Aboriginal people living under the most intensive non-Aboriginal influence. Distinctive Aboriginal discourse features within this population might be expected to be found much more strongly in populations living in areas more removed from European Australian influence.

Learning Genres

Table 1 shows the distribution of genres among 100 Yamatji texts and 100 Nyungar texts in our corpus:

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Genre	Yamatji Lands	Nyungar Lands
Recount, 1st person	50	57
Recount, 3rd person	7	4
Recount, 3rd person, attributed	9	1
Recount, collaborative	1	4
Narrative	4	5
Expository	1	4
Report	21	3
Procedure	4	1
Explanation	1	1
Conversation	1	1
Joke	1	
Recount, 1st person/Procedure		3
Recount, 1st person/Narrative		3
Recount, 1st person/Spinning a Yarn		1
Recount, 1st person/Dramatization		5
Recount, 3rd person/Dramatization		1
Recount, 3rd person/Joke		1
Narrative/Recount 1st person		3
Procedure/Recount 1st person		1
Report/Dramatization		1
Total	100	100

Table 1: Genres Identified in 200 Aboriginal oral texts

The data represented here enable a number of observations to be made about the genres which occur in the collective repertoire of these Aboriginal speakers. First, with respect to the range of genres occurring, it is apparent that it includes many of those which are represented in school curricula. The speakers here, left to choose their own genre in expressing themselves, obviously have a strong preference for the Recount, but they are not (as some writers have suggested) limited to that. Narrative, Expository, Report and Procedure are not genres beyond their communal repertoire, although it is clear that (with the possible exception of Report) they are not generally favoured means of expression.

Report is a case worth additional comment. It is clear that the speakers in the Yamatji lands used this genre much more frequently than the speakers in the Nyungar lands. When we look more closely at the reports, we see that they tend to be particularized in their content. The speakers are usually reporting on something which they observed, be it an incident, a feature of the environment, or the behaviour of a bird or animal. The speakers were addressing investigators who, they knew, had travelled some 400 kilometres or more from the city to reach the Yamatji Lands and they were usually using the Report genre to inform them of local features or events. The same motivation was not present among the Nyungar speakers who were Perth dwellers, speaking to Perth dwellers.

Another difference between the two populations which is worth noting is the greater frequency of use of the third person attributed recount among the Yamatji speakers. Such recounts might begin, for example, as follows:

"My Dad told me this story once" (Y51)
"My.. mob- my great grandfather he told my mum..
And e told my.. my mum's grandmother
An my mum's grandma told my mum mum
An my mum mum tole me..." (Y30)
"Oh well this what my oldest brother reckon" (Y58)

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It is clear that Aboriginal informants are most comfortable using the first person recount form (as the figures show) where they are reporting only on what has happened to themselves. To report on what has been experienced by someone else is not normally one's place, and one must use a disclaimer if doing so, to show that one has the authority to divulge this information. The constraint also applied among urban dwelling Aborigines, but it was clearly more strongly in evidence among the rural-dwelling people whom we interviewed.

This leads us to the other matter which obviously deserves comment: the prevalence of the first person Recount. Overwhelmingly, across both Aboriginal groups and all age groups, the preferred genre is the first person Recount. Does this represent, as has sometimes been suggested (e.g. Rose, Gray and Cowey 1999:29) a communicative limitation, resulting from inadequate exposure to literate text models, or is it associated with a vigorous and strongly maintained tradition of oral verbal art? Our data clearly show that the Recount can be, among skilled Aboriginal exponents, an expressive genre of great subtlety and with multifunctional application. It is, for Aboriginal English speakers, the default genre, fitting, as it does, their interpersonal style of neither speaking on behalf of others, nor distancing oneself from people by putting oneself forward as a source of information about the world.

The other matter from Table 1 requiring comment is the tendency on the part of the city dwelling (Nyungar) speakers to use what we have called "hybrid genres". Most commonly, we found that they combined the Recount with some other form, such as Narrative or Procedure or "Dramatization," showing, as we see it, a tendency to accommodate more than the Yamatji speakers to the norms of the vastly more numerous non-Aboriginal population around them. What we have called "Dramatization" refers to a genre where the speaker strives for audience effect by using a punch line or exaggerated climax to an event they have experienced or observed.

When we engage in a close linguistic analysis of the oral narratives in our corpus we see that they embody a range of structural and stylistic features which characterize the genres at the formal level and also link them to the schemas which, in our view, help to generate them. Time does not permit other than a very selective analysis of such features. (A fuller analysis will be found in Malcolm (in preparation)). It is necessary, however, to make reference to some of the features which help to reveal the distinctive discourse skills which speakers of Aboriginal English bring to their schooling.

A number of features perform the function of relating the discourse to the schema or schemas which are activated in the mind of the speaker while the discourse proceeds. These features link the speaker with the Aboriginal listener who can be assumed to have the same schema activated. However they often confuse the non-Aboriginal listener who does not share the schema which lends them meaning. Table 2 shows those schemas which occurred more than ten times in our data, in order of frequency of occurrence:

Schema	Occurrences in Yamatji Data	Occurrences in Nyungar Data	Total Occurrences
Scary Things	28	23	51
Observing	28	13	41
Hunting	20	20	40
Travel	8	16	24
Family		19	19
Problem-Solution	8	8	16
Social Relationships		11	11

Table 2: Schemas Identified more than 10 times in 200 Aboriginal oral texts

A schema may be shown in the organization of the discourse, as where, for example, the Travel schema (linking the present to the timeless past when spirit beings travelled the land, creating its features) generates a framework of moving and stopping within which the action is represented, or the Observing schema, where the discourse feature I have called *surveying* (Malcolm et al 1999) is used, giving equal attention to

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prominent and peripheral features of the scene being observed, thus following the pattern of observation of the environment which is basic to the life of a hunting and gathering community.

A second way in which the presence of schemas may be made apparent in the discourse is through allusion. It is sufficient for a speaker to include a single image in the discourse to evoke the schema of which it forms a part in the mind of the listener. These images have become familiar to the members of the speech community because of their repeated occurrence, but their significance would escape the listener who was not familiar with the schema with which they are associated. Scary Things schemas are particularly evoked by such images as "he disappeared", "I seen dis red eye", "she seen all de mans comin", "e looked in the (rear) vision mirror", "we can 'ear dese people singin", "the Indian was lookin' at 'im". These are all associated in some way with avenging figures which come secretly and take people away. By extension, the same schema may evoke the experience of the "stolen generation" who were taken from their parents early in the 20th century under Australian law. Other common allusions are to dogs barking, windows or doors being open and fences being scaled.

The existence of a shared schema means that it is not necessary for speakers to be very explicit. It is common knowledge, on the basis of the Hunting schema, for example, that establishing that a dead kangaroo you come across is still "fresh" means that it is a potential meal, or on the basis of the Scary Things schema, that, if you see a bird or an animal behaving in an unusual way there is probably a spiritual explanation for this, or, on the basis of the family schema, that if an offence has been committed against a cousin, one may need to accept the responsibility for payback. At the same time, because of the assumption of shared schemas, speakers may often be deliberately vague, substituting the word "thing" for any noun or verb, and breaking the generally applying rules of anaphora, by referring to elements not previously mentioned with "that" or "dat", as if they were a part of the co-text. With respect to such occurrences, Sharifian (2000:6) has suggested that the speakers are using *schema-based referencing* as opposed to text-based referencing.

In addition to these and other schema-related discourse skills, some Aboriginal narrators display a range of other discourse skills to some of which we shall make brief reference. I shall consider first three commonly occurring discourse markers and then three discourse strategies.
The three discourse markers are all illustrated in the following text extract which comes from a session in which three 15 year old Nyungar girls (A and P are in this extract) were talking with their teacher (J):

1	A:	I hate when I have a dream	I
2		an' I wake up	I
3		'CAUSE c- c- if I'm facing the other way ↑	I
4		I'll always look at my door, like **you know**	I
5	P:	[To see if anyone's there]	
6	A:	and *like* it's always *like* black	I
7		and *like* 'CAUSE I got *like* things hanging from the door ↑	I
8		and it's *like* sometimes you *like* waking up	I
9		and **you know**	I
10		*like* Ann ↓	N
11		you know Ann?	I

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12	J:	Walker		
13	A:	*Like* um we was at her house	↓	N
13		an ' we were sleeping		N
14		we was watching Mo Money.		N
15		Ohh an' I'm never watching that movie again at night time		I
16		an' um 'CAUSE we joined the two lounges up together	↑	N
17		and I was on the lounge by myself		N
18		and she was there		N
19		an' she um ,she fell asleep	↓	N
20		an' I fell asleep		N
21		but I could still hear it **you know**		I
22		an' then I started sleepin'		N
23		an' um she looked out the window,		N
24		an' I'm- someone -		N
25		'CAUSE *like* they always closed their their blinds	↑	N
26		but this time it was a little bit open -		N
27		and someone was there watching 'er,	↓	N

The narrator (A)'s attention is constantly shifting between the world of her narrative and the world of her present interaction, so the idea units she is dealing with are constantly changing. The first nine lines are strongly oriented towards the addressees, because A is preparing the ground for the story which is to follow. All the idea units are what I would call *interactive*, because she is locating herself in the present situation with the listeners and addressing them directly. This orientation is reinforced twice in the section (in lines 4 and 9) with the marker *you know*, which invites assent and shows audience awareness.
In line 10, A introduces the person with whom she shared the experience, who is her link to the narrated world, and this is the first in a series of *narrative* units. In line 15, A clearly interrupts her narrative to return to the *interactive* world and share with her listeners how she currently feels. She makes another return to the interactive world in line 21, marking this with the confirmation request *you know*. While all this is going on, we see that A is also managing the matter of shared and unshared knowledge between herself and her addressees. She uses another marker for this, the marker I call *explanatory 'cause*. This occurs in lines 3, 7, 16 and 25 (in capitals). On each occasion it directs the attention of the listener to something which has already happened at the time of the narrative, hence the backwards arrows I have inserted at these points. A is also managing the use of yet another discourse marker, which she uses eight times, though only at specific points in the narrative. This is *like*, which functions strongly with the sense of exemplification of what is being talked about and, in this function, introduces the whole of the narrative section in line 10. The sense of exemplification seems to be associated with a sense of anticipation, since *like* always sets up an expectation in the reader. When *like* is mentioned, the listener will be entertained with an illustration or a story or something that is worth holding the narrative up for. Thus, we find that in lines 6, 7 and 8, in each of which it is used twice, it is associated with scary and embarrassing revelations:

the narrator is scared of the dark, she sees the clothes hanging on the door and imagines they might be intruders and she can't sleep. Similarly, in line 25, *like* occurs just as we are about to receive the significant information that the blind was left "open" – the word which immediately invokes the "Scary Things" schema.

Discourse markers, then, are frequently in evidence in the texts we have examined and they are managed by the speakers in subtle ways. The three that we have had time to illustrate only begin to give evidence of this complexity.

The Aboriginal oral narrators also give evidence of what I call *discourse strategies*, by which I mean various stylistic and performance options which have become an established part of this form of narrative. One of these which links Aboriginal oral discourse with the oral art of many cultures is the use of *parallelism*, or the expression of the same content in two different ways in succession or in close proximity within a text. This is illustrated briefly in Texts A, B and C below:

Text A
That belongs to that pool, a big snake.
You gotta throw sand in dere
to let im know when who you are.
Same when you swim in the Murchison River (Y96)
...
So you gotta throw sand in.
That means you won't get sick.
And you're from that country
Or if you're a stranger
If I went down to Perth somewhere
Or xxx, I'd throw sand it it...

Text B
J she came out like dat dere...
she nearly killed dat snake
A she stepped on the snake like dat
J Yeah.
A She stepped on the snake (P19)

Text C
and he still comin back,
comin back ome,
...
an e was drivin along,
an xx he looked in is (rear) vision mirror
and big light was behin im,
so e didn't worry about it
and e kept on goin along,
an when e looked again
it wasn't dere, xxxx,
so e was driving along ... (Y44)

Another strategy, which indeed, as Christie (1997:144) has noted, is not uncommon among non-Aboriginal Australians, is co-narration. This occurs when two speakers cooperate in relating a shared experience. Among Aboriginal co-narrators there is typically no competition for turns. While one is narrating the other typically engages in supportive backchannelling, with *yeah*, or *unna*. At some point the first speaker may yield the floor and the backchannelling may turn into a turn for the second speaker. Co-narration has its counterparts in traditional Aboriginal culture where, for example, in ceremonial song cycles, one singer might take over from another from time to time (Rochecouste and Malcolm 2000:12).

We have space to mention just one further strategy and that is the use of *parataxis*, or the placing together of clauses without intervening conjunctions. This, like parallellism, is a strategy common to oral genres in

other cultures and it may heighten the dramatic effect. It is particularly employed by Aboriginal narrators when they are using the hunting schema.

Egs. 'ang back shot the kangaroo hit the part up there (P43)
I jumped over the table busted up my nail (P28).

The aforegoing provides, I hope, evidence that Aboriginal students are accomplished learners of genres in their own communities, quite independently of what may go on at school. They can use a range of genres in relation to distinctive schemas to convey messages of diverse functions and they are familiar with the management of complex discourse skills.

Learning About Genres

In terms of the second of our themes, learning *about* genres, Aboriginal students may be less well equipped, if only because Aboriginal learning tends not to focus on the analysis of the object of learning into its elements. It is not that Aboriginal students are unaware of the differences between the genres in their life experience. Aboriginal society delights in *yarning* and it is not uncommon for Aboriginal speakers, in the absence of non-Aboriginal people, to parody the genres they observe being conducted in "flash English" by other Australians. Our informants occasionally gave parodies of school genres, such as the morning news session and the fairy story. They display, thus, intertextual competency up to a point even in the genres which are not a part of the Aboriginal culture. If the genres to which they are exposed are viewed holistically, Aboriginal students are likely to be readily able to identify them. However, Aboriginal students may be bewildered by attempts to reduce genres to structural formulae or boxes on paper representing their sequential stages.

With respect to the genres of their own communities, Aboriginal students possess significant interpretive skills. It has been argued on the basis of our data by Sharifian (2000:10) that Aboriginal children, by virtue of their participation in their own community, have access to what he calls *societal schemata*, or constructs which are held in common by members of the community and used to interpret experience. Such knowledge is used not only to interpret discoursal phenomena but also songs, dances, paintings and other phenomena with meanings held in common by the group (p. 14). They may, indeed, be more familiar with intertextual interpretive practices across modes of expression than are many of their Western counterparts in the school setting.

Learning Through Genres

Aboriginal students are also familiar, when they come to school, with learning *through* genres, although the genres through which they learn are not those valued by the school system. Oral discourse provides in many ways a foundation for the maintenance of Aboriginal cultural values. In the south west of Western Australia *yarning* provides a socially recognized means of sharing in and reinforcing group values and norms. Farzad Sharifian, in work associated with this research, has identified yarning as a societal schema and expressed it in a cultural script, following the Natural Semantic Metalanguage proposed by Wierzbicka (1996), as follows:

"For some time we say things to each other
It is good if people say things like this to each other
Because we do this, we can know the same things
It is good if we often do this kind of thing together."

Through yarning, Aboriginal children hear about what they ought to know and what they ought not to inquire after; they see exemplified culturally valued patterns of behaviour and they see shamed behaviours which are dangerous or which contravene social norms; they see themselves as part of a community with common values. Among the functions which we have seen yarning (usually identified as Recounts in our data) perform are: warning of the dangers of separation from the group; warning of the dangers of trespassing on others' territory; warning of the dangers of being curious about forbidden knowledge; providing patterns of persistence (a cultural value associated with hunting); providing patterns of payback in defence of relatives; providing patterns of respect for older people and people with spiritual powers; shaming those who show disrespect for the sacred snake; shaming those who lack fortitude; shaming those

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who obstruct the proper process of hunting and shaming those who have not acquired appropriate skills, like cooking.

Perhaps more significantly, it is apparent that Aboriginal children characteristically use genres as a means of autonomous learning. This is why the Observation schema is so often employed. Aboriginal children repeatedly tell one another (and adults) what they have observed and in so doing they sharpen their powers of observation. But they also use other schemas: they tell one another about the encounters they have had with the spirit world, and in so doing they develop spiritual awareness; they tell one another about their frightening experiences, and so they objectify their fears and deal with them; they tell one another about foolish mistakes they have made, and so they reinforce their learning not to make such mistakes again. We have examples to illustrate all of these practices but there is not space to include them here. (See further Rochecouste and Malcolm 2000 and Malcolm, in preparation).

Aboriginal students, then, come to school experienced in learning genres, learning about genres and learning through genres, although their experience in the genres and schemas associated with school learning is limited. What, then, can schools do which will build on what such students already possess and empower them to participate effectively in society beyond their own communities?

What Aboriginal Students Need for their Competencies in Genre to be Extended

Learning Genres

It is clear that Aboriginal students need to learn new genres and much valuable work has been achieved by the promoters of the genre approach in identifying and clarifying some of genres which need to be learned to enable further learning and the development of employable skills to take place. There are, as we have noted, cultural reasons why Aboriginal students prefer to use the Recount rather than other genres whenever possible, but one of the functions of the school must be to help them to extend the range of genres within which they can operate comfortably. As in all educational endeavours, it is important to move from the known to the unknown. This means from the oral to the written, from the experience-focused (Recount) to the content-focused (Narrative), objective description-focused (Report), process-focused (Procedure), cause-focused (Expository), etc. But none of these alternative ways of focusing the energies of the author should be seen as replacing the recount, since personal experience remains the bedrock on which all learning is built.

In extending the range of genres which students can employ it is important that Aboriginal students be clearly shown the differences in aim, context and structure of each new genre. As we have seen, nearly 20% of the genres we recorded from city-dwelling Aboriginal students were hybrid, attempting to combine discourse forms which are more effective if kept separate.

A further consideration is that, in teaching genres to Aboriginal students, teachers need to be aware of the important relationship between genres and schemas. While an Aboriginal student is working from a basis of schemas coming from his or her own culture it will be meaningless to impose on them a genre which associates with a different schema. In other words, the teacher needs to recognize that the forms of the expression of knowledge which are approved and maintained in the wider society relate to non-universal schemas which give them meaning. Even the problem-solution schema, which, while present in our data, is borrowed rather than native to Aboriginal speakers, is based on underlying notions about the active, rather than ecological, role of the human in relation to the environment. One way of exploring schemas, which teachers could easily employ, would be to ask their students to create chains of association around key words. This would show the extent to which shared knowledge was being invoked by the concepts in question. Another strategy would be to develop with the students an 'ideas map' on the blackboard (or equivalent) to provide an agreed schema relevant to the topic concerned before asking students to write in whatever the genre might be.

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In all this, genres need to be taught within an atmosphere of inclusivity, so that they are seen as options which are open to the individual rather than as a prescribed pattern of behaviour based on the assumption that everyone is the same. No speaker of a non-standard dialect should be expected to surrender their dialect as a condition of education. Rather, the approach should be bidialectal, facilitating the effective and harmonious co-existence of alternative patterns of behaviour for alternative cultural settings. It is clear that the oral traditions of Aboriginal English speakers are an important part of Australia's cultural tradition and deserve maintenance within, not only outside of, education systems.

Learning About Genres

When it comes to learning about genres, the range of genres about which students learn should be extended. It is probably not appropriate for non-Aboriginal students to be expected to learn to use Aboriginal English genres. (Later, perhaps, this may be desirable for those who will be working within Aboriginal communities). However, all students who share in the same education system should be aware of one another's genres and able to appreciate them in their place.

It is important that learning about genres should not be interpreted as learning to analyse genres. We have observed that Aboriginal students are holistic rather than analytic learners and will respond best, at least initially, to holistic approaches to the presentation of knowledge. They characteristically have well developed powers of observation, and these powers should be drawn upon in the education system. Aboriginal students can effectively parody non-Aboriginal genres that they might not be able to analyse. Such skills suggest that genres can be reproduced without being analysed. The use of plan boxes for genre writing may not be helpful to Aboriginal students and may even get in the way of their employing their more holistic imitative skills.

Learning Through Genres

There is much evidence, dating back over many years (Malcolm 1979) that the instructional genres employed by teachers do not always facilitate the participation of Aboriginal students. They tend to be intimidated by the situation where they are expected to make responses to the teacher with the whole class as an audience. They crave the company of their peers and often try to interact on a group basis rather than individually with the teacher. It would be wrong to assume from this, as we have seen, that Aboriginal students lack the capacity to learn through genres. They have learned effectively through such genres as yarning and multi-modal communicative experiences in out-of-school settings. Their non-conformist behaviours in school are simply a reflection that the genres through which instruction is being given to them are inappropriate. It is, then, important that teachers of Indigenous students should learn about their existing patterns of learning and attempt at least to compromise with these in the way in which school learning is conducted.

It should be remembered, as Paltridge (1995) has pointed out, that genres are learned through intertextual processes. Aboriginal students may lack the background in supportive genres to be able to quickly recognize or conform to genres which are given prominence in school. Where this is the case, teachers should inform themselves of the repertoire of genres which students are exposed to outside the school and not place unrealistic demands on the students.

Ideally, Aboriginal students should have as many experiences as possible of peer-learning, since that will enable them to negotiate the genres appropriate for their learning rather than having to conform to whole-class patterns suiting the non-Aboriginal majority. And teachers should learn from the fact that Aboriginal students are experienced autonomous learners who know the value of discourse as a learning tool. Learning experiences should be devised which will tap into these skills.

Conclusion

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Until recently, little has been known of the naturalistic English discourse skills of Aboriginal children, because most educationally oriented studies have ignored their out-of-classroom performance and concentrated on changing their behaviours as quickly as possible through classroom instruction. In my view, the genre approach, as it has been interpreted in most Australian schools, has tended to follow this pattern. An alternative pattern is proposed here, according to which capacities of Aboriginal students to learn, learn about and learn through genres in their own communities should be understood, recognized and built on by educators in an overall bidialectal framework.

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Acknowledgements

1. The data reported on in this paper come from the projects *Aboriginal English Genres in the Yamatji Lands of Western Australia*, funded by Edith Cowan University, and *Aboriginal English Genres in Perth*, funded by the Australian Research Council. The funding which made this work possible is gratefully acknowledged.
2. The work of which this paper is an outcome has involved the efforts of a team of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, including Alison Hill, Eva Hill, Fred Taylor, Glenys Collard, Louella Eggington, Judith Rochecouste, Farzad Sharifian, Victor Patrick, Ellen Grote, Angela Kickett, Alison Newell and others, to whom I express my thanks. Particular thanks are due to Farzad Sharifian for his contribution of the cultural script on *yarning* and to Anne Thwaite for helpful feedback.

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